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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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PARIS AND LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: BENIN TO HOST SAHEL-SAHARAN STATES COMMUNITY SUMMIT
(CEN-SAD) IN JUNE 2008

REFERENCE: COTONOU 00161

¶1. (U) Summary: The Government of Benin (GOB) is preparing to host in June 2008 the 10th Summit of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD). To help ensure a successful summit, there is massive road and housing construction in Cotonou to increase accommodation capacity for the many delegates expected from the 25 member states of CEN-SAD. By hosting such a large, high profile international event, Benin gains prestige and boost ties with Libya, the current CEN-SAD chair, principal mover behind CEN-SAD and presumed financier of much of the construction underway in Cotonou. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Benin was selected to host the 10th CEN-SAD at the 9th Summit that took place June 02-03, 2007 in Sirte, Libya. The GOB views this selection as a great diplomatic success for the country, with positive economic spin-offs from the preparations for this unprecedented event (Note: Counting the Cotonou 6th Summit of French Speaking Countries -Francophonie - in 1991, this is only Benin's second ever such high profile event with the large number of heads of state expected to attend. End note). The preparations include the construction of 69 luxury houses to accommodate visiting presidents and high ranking officials, which has generated significant employment opportunities and a dire shortage in the country's cement production (Reftel). In addition, several principal roads in Cotonou are being repaired or totally reconstructed, causing great inconvenience to road users and some residents.

¶3. (U) Significantly, a meeting of the CEN-SAD Ministers of transportation has been scheduled for March 25-27, 2008 to review transportation strategies for the forthcoming summit. The summit is one of President Yayi's priorities, and he personally coordinates the preparations, including frequent visits to the villa construction site to check on the progress of the work.

¶4. (U) CEN-SAD, an international organization of 25 African states, was set up by Colonel Mu'ammarr Kadhafi on February 4, 1998 in Tripoli following a summit that brought together the heads of state of Libya, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Sudan and Chad. The organization aims to establish a regional economic union based on a strategy of joint development plans of member states, coordinating investment in agriculture, industry, energy, as well as social and cultural issues. CEN-SAD objectives also include the suppression of all restrictions that hinder the smooth integration of its member states, the promotion of external trade through an investment policy in member states, and the increase of land, air and maritime transportation capacity via the implementation of joint projects.

¶5. (U) The organization started with 6 member states in 1998 and now has a community of 25, including Benin, which joined in 2002.

According to observers, the CEN-SAD is a major political, economical and social movement that seeks to meet the challenges of globalization.

¶6. (U) CEN-SAD objectives are attractive to African states, because they foster regional integration and offer a lucrative mechanism for promoting goals of economic growth and prosperity. Also, it enables the member states that host CEN-SAD summits to shine diplomatically. For Benin, the forthcoming summit is an element of President Yayi's efforts to play a leading diplomatic role in West Africa.

¶7. (U) Benin increased its cooperation with Libya between the 1970s and early 1980s under former President Kerekou's Marxist-Leninist administration, which sought support from socialist countries. Since that time, bilateral cooperation has covered the areas of defense, health, finance, transport, building, rural development, education and culture. Since his March election (and April inauguration) in 2006 on a democratic platform for reform and change, President Yayi has engaged in an extensive overseas visit program to boost ties with Benin's traditional development partners, including European countries, Libya and China.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Apart from the CEN-SAD member state contributions, Kadhafi appears to be the primary financier of this summit and its cheerleader. Kadhafi's efforts to channel countries into CEN-SAD may be viewed as an alternative means to achieve his controversial vision of a United States of Africa and influence over African countries. Benin has received an unknown (but presumed substantial) amount of Libyan funding for infrastructure development related to the summit, which likely will have some positive economic spin-offs if not off-set by the insufficient cement supply for other uses.

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